

# History and Culture

## READ TO DISCOVER

1. What peoples have settled in and ruled North Africa?
2. What are the people and culture of the region like today?

## WHY IT MATTERS

Archaeological discoveries in Egypt and other parts of North Africa tell us much about early human history. Use [CNNfyi.com](http://CNNfyi.com) or other **current events** sources to learn about recent archaeological research in the region.

## IDENTIFY

Berbers

## DEFINE

silt

pharaohs

hieroglyphs

## LOCATE

Alexandria

Cairo

Marrakech

Maghreb

Suez Canal

Sinai Peninsula

Casablanca

Fès

## History

The first people in North Africa were hunter-gatherers. They lived in areas where the climates were best. By 4000 B.C., much of North Africa had become desert. The human population became concentrated along the Mediterranean coast, desert oases, wadis, and the Nile River. Every year, the Nile would flood. These floods spread **silt**, which is fertile finely ground soil, over the river's banks.

**Early Peoples** Beginning about 3000 B.C., a great civilization grew along the Nile River and its delta in Egypt. A series of kingdoms arose, ruled by monarchs called **pharaohs**. These rulers were considered gods and had complete power over the Egyptian people. The Egyptians built great pyramids and other monuments that still stand today. They developed a writing system that used pictures and symbols called **hieroglyphs**. Egyptian astronomers created a 365-day calendar. They also learned to predict the annual floods of the Nile. Every year, when Sirius—the brightest star in the sky—appeared above the horizon at sunrise, the flood would soon follow. Because the Egyptians depended on the Nile's floods for farming, this information was key to their survival. From 1570 B.C. to 1085 B.C., Egypt expanded its power into the area that is now Syria, Israel, and Libya.

Later, as Egyptian power weakened, foreigners began to control much of North Africa. Those foreigners included the Phoenicians, Greeks, and Romans. The



*This ancient Egyptian illustration from the Book of the Dead shows Horus, the falcon-god, introducing an Egyptian to the presence of Osiris, god of the underworld. The Book of the Dead was a collection of texts, spells, and formulas placed in tombs to help the dead in the afterlife. It contains many outstanding examples of ancient Egyptian art.*

*In Greek mythology, the giant Atlas held the world on his shoulders somewhere near the western end of North Africa. The Atlas Mountains are named for him. In the 1500s, collections of maps or charts came to be called atlases because mapmakers included images of Atlas holding Earth in them.*



Phoenicians were sailors and traders from what is now Lebanon. They set up many Mediterranean trading colonies such as Carthage, which was founded in about 800 B.C. in modern-day Tunisia. Alexander the Great, at the head of a Greek army, founded the city of Alexandria in Egypt in 332 B.C. The Roman Empire became a great power in North Africa after it destroyed Carthage in 146 B.C. After the Roman Empire crumbled in the A.D. 400s, a Germanic tribe called the Vandals moved south through Spain into Africa. They set up a kingdom in what is now Libya. In the A.D. 500s the Byzantine Empire, which had been the Eastern Roman Empire, recaptured most of North Africa.

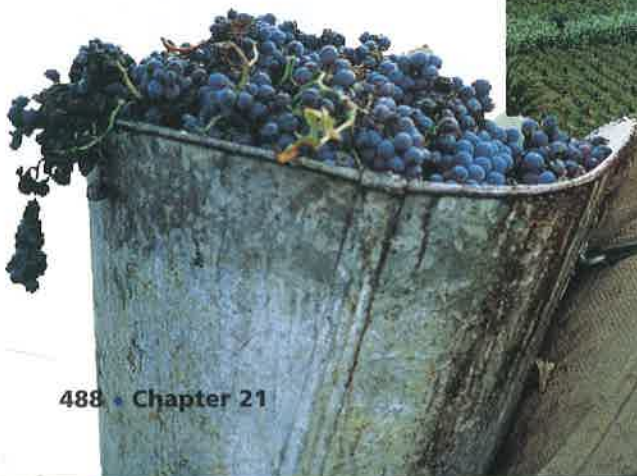
**The Arabs and Islam** Byzantine rule over North Africa was short-lived. In the 600s Arab armies from Southwest Asia swept across North Africa. They reached Africa's Atlantic coast and conquered Morocco by the early 700s. Arab armies also crossed into Iberia in the year 711. Most people in North Africa became Muslims. In addition, Arabic became the main language of the area.

Under Arab rule, Cairo and other North African cities became great centers of Islamic culture and education. Cities like Marrakech in Morocco became centers of trade between central and western Africa, Europe, and Arabia. Such cities grew rich trading gold, ivory, and spices as well as slaves. However, in the 1500s outsiders again invaded North Africa. The Ottomans—Muslims based in what is now Turkey—took control first of Egypt and then of Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria.

✓ **READING CHECK:** **Human Systems** What religion and language did the Arabs bring to North Africa?

#### INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD

*French colonists in Algeria found that the region was perfect for vineyards, and Algerian wine became a major export under French rule. However, it is mainly produced for export because most Algerians are Muslim and are forbidden to drink alcohol. How did cultural patterns influence the diffusion of crops to Algeria and affect the country's cultural landscapes?*



control of northern Morocco. Thousands of French, Spaniards, and Italians settled in North Africa in the decades that followed. More than 100 years later, the large number of French living in Algeria would complicate that country's struggle for independence.

In 1882 Great Britain took over Egypt. Britain wanted control of the Suez Canal, which connects the Mediterranean with the Red Sea. The canal was an important trade link between Europe and Britain's colony of India. Italy completed the European conquest of North Africa by taking Libya from the Ottoman Empire in 1912.

**Independence** North Africans resented European rule. They did not have the same rights as the European settlers. Over time North Africans worked to win their independence. In 1922 Egypt gained limited independence from Great Britain. However, independence efforts across the region became stronger after World War II ended in 1945.

In 1952 a group of Egyptian military officers led a revolution that brought complete independence from Britain. France granted Tunisia and Morocco their independence in 1956. Yet the French fought a bloody war to hold on to Algeria. When Algeria finally won independence in 1962, most of the French population left.

Libya became an independent kingdom in 1951. In 1969, military officers led by Mu'ammar Gadhafi overthrew the monarchy. Gadhafi declared the country a socialist republic and adopted anti-Western policies.

✓ **READING CHECK:** **Human Systems** How did independence affect Algeria's human geography?



## Culture

The countries of North Africa share a similar history and Muslim culture. Still, there is a great deal of variation among them.

**People and Languages** Nearly all of the people of North Africa consider themselves Arab or Arab-Berber. The **Berbers** are a cultural group that lived in North Africa long before waves of Arab armies crossed the continent. Also, small groups of desert nomads called Bedouins live along the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt.

Arabic is the official language of every country in North Africa. However, the people of each country speak their own version of Arabic. In some rural areas Berber dialects are also common. Because of the influence of colonization, many people also speak European languages. French is still widely used in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. Italian is spoken in Libya, and English is used in Egypt.

**Settlement and Land Use** Most North Africans live along the Mediterranean coast or in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains. An exception to this pattern is found in Egypt. About 99 percent of that country's 69 million people live in the Nile Valley and Delta. Together, those populated areas make up only 3 percent of Egypt's land. Cairo, Egypt's



## Naguib Mahfouz

In 1988 Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz became the first Arab to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. Mahfouz was born in Cairo in 1911. He has written some 40 novels and short story collections as well as many plays and screenplays.

Mahfouz's first books were set in ancient Egypt. Later works dealt with contemporary subjects. In *The Cairo Trilogy*, for example, the story of a large middle-class Egyptian family connects to colonial and modern political history.

Mahfouz has often written about social issues, such as the status of women and political prisoners. *Children of the Alley* features characters that symbolize Adam, Moses, and other religious figures. Some people criticized the book, saying it was disrespectful to Islam. Nevertheless, Mahfouz is one of the region's most respected writers.

**Evaluating** If you were to write a novel about North Africa, which parts of its history or culture would you use as background? Why would you choose those topics?

capital, lies in the Nile Delta. With a population of more than 10 million, Cairo is the largest urban area in North Africa. Egypt also has the largest population of any Arab country.

Urban overcrowding is a problem across all of North Africa. People from the countryside are pouring into cities in hopes of finding work and a better life. Casablanca, the largest city in Morocco, must absorb about 30,000 new migrants every year.

✓ **READING CHECK:** *Human Systems* In what areas are most of the population of North Africa found?



### FOCUS ON CULTURE

**The Medina** Most old Arab cities in North Africa developed within the protective walls of a Casbah, or fort. As the population of the city grew, the buildings within the city's walls were built higher and closer together. Space was limited, and streets were as narrow as possible, often twisting at odd angles. The high walls and narrow streets also created shade that kept people and buildings cool in the hot climate.

When colonial governments took over North Africa, they built European-style cities around the old Arab city, or medina. However, people did not abandon the medina for the wide boulevards and spacious air-conditioned buildings of newer areas. Many medinas in North Africa remain lively places where people live and go for social interaction, shopping, and prayer. One of the most famous medinas in the world is in Fès, Morocco. There, tens of thousands of people crowd into a square mile of densely packed buildings.

✓ **READING CHECK:** *Human Systems* What are the medinas of old Arab cities of the region like?



#### INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD

*The medina in Tunis was built during the A.D. 600s and is the cultural and historical focus of the city. During the colonial era, the French built a new area around the medina known as the ville nouvelle, or "new city." What architectural features can you see in the photo that are typically found in medinas?*



**Religion** Most North Africans are Muslim, except for very small Christian and Jewish minorities. Islam plays a major role in North African life. For example, the five daily prayers punctuate life and mark the time for appointments. In addition, Fridays are special days when Muslims meet in mosques for prayer. In many cities across North Africa, businesses close on Thursday and Friday before opening again on Saturday. Businesses also close early for religious holidays, such as *Id al-Adha*. During this holiday, Muslim families sacrifice a sheep in honor of the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his own son to prove his devotion to Allah. Islamic holidays are celebrated according to a lunar calendar. As a result, holidays shift over the years, being celebrated earlier each year according to the Western calendar.

**Traditions and Customs** Many North Africans wear traditional clothing. While there are many regional variations, in general North African clothing is long and loose. Such styles are ideal for the region's hot climates. Men and women often wear caftans and hooded robes made with a variety of fabrics. In Egypt the caftan and the *gallibiya*, or pants and a long shirtlike garment, are popular. Many women dress according to Muslim tradition. Their clothing covers all of the body except the face and hands.

When people greet each other in the street, they often shake hands and then touch their hand to their heart. If they are family or very close friends, they will kiss each other on the cheek. The number and pattern of the kisses vary from country to country.

Celebrations such as marriages are very important to North Africans because the family is central in Arab culture. Weddings can last for several days. Except for the last day of the wedding, the women's and men's celebrations are held separately.

✓ **READING CHECK:** *Human Systems* How and why are traditional clothes of different North African countries generally similar?



#### INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD

*Cafés are popular places for men to socialize throughout North Africa. There, they play chess or dominoes, talk, or simply watch people passing by on the street. Most women socialize only at home.*

**How are the social customs of cafés in North Africa different from those of cafés in this country?**



## Review

**Identify** Berbers

**Define** silt, pharaohs, hieroglyphs

**Working with Sketch Maps** On the map you created in Section 1, label Alexandria, Cairo, Marrakech, Maghreb, Suez Canal, Sinai Peninsula, Casablanca, and Fès. Which city was founded by Alexander the Great?

### Reading for the Main Idea

1. **Human Systems** Who were some early peoples that ruled over areas of North Africa?
2. **Human Systems** Why was control of the Suez Canal important to the British Empire?
3. **Places and Regions** What is the main ethnic group, language, and religion in the region?

### Critical Thinking

4. **Identifying Cause and Effect** Why do many people in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia speak French as a second language today?

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### Organizing What You Know

5. Create a time line like the one shown below. On your time line, list important years, periods, and events in the history of North Africa.

